

# COMMUNITY NEWS

Wednesday, November 23, 2011 • Page A-4

## County's new safety measures aimed at protecting pedestrians

■ New signs painted on dangerous roads countywide

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Montgomery County is trying to stop pedestrians from walking all over safety rules.

To do so, the county launched a new curb sign campaign on Piney Branch Road between Flower Avenue and the Prince George's County border in Silver Spring this month, as well as at some of the other most dangerous stretches of road in the county.

On Piney Branch, signs reading "Do not cross" were spray painted on curbs every 20 feet along the road in Spanish and English. At pedestrian crosswalks, curb signs read, "Cross here."

The section of Piney Branch Road has one of the highest pedestrian fatality rates in the county, said Jeff Dunckel, pedestrian safety coordinator for the county. There were on average 8.8 collisions per year on Piney Branch Road in the five years before 2008.

The length of Piney Branch Road is one of eight locations where the county has been actively trying to increase pedestrian safety and awareness, Dunckel said. The other locations include two more in Silver Spring — Georgia Avenue between Spring Street and Sligo Avenue and the intersection of U.S. 29 and University Boulevard — as well as locations at Wisconsin Avenue between Leland and Montgomery avenues in Bethesda, Rockville Pike from Hubbard Drive to Halpine Road in Rockville, Reedie Drive from Georgia Avenue to Veirs Mill Road in Wheaton, Randolph Road from Colie Drive to Selfridge Road in Wheaton and Connecticut Avenue from Georgia Avenue to Independence Street in Aspen Hill.



KRISTI TOUSIGNANT/THE GAZETTE

Cars drive by new curb signs cautioning pedestrian safety on Piney Branch Road in Silver Spring. The warnings are part of a new initiative by Montgomery County to curb pedestrian accidents on the road.

Dunckel said he and his staff treat each location differently depending on its safety needs. The county found a majority of the pedestrian accidents on Piney Branch Road were caused by pedestrians instead of drivers, prompting the curb sign strategy, Dunckel said.

"What we are trying to do is emphasize to pedestrians to not cross where there is no crosswalk," Dunckel said.

Frances Ballard, 72, of Takoma Park walks down Flower Avenue and across Piney Branch Road every other day or so to go grocery shopping.

Ballard, who carried a brown paper bag of groceries Monday, said she often felt unsafe crossing the street, sometimes because the crossing lights would not work or drivers would not pay attention.

"You can't be too careful," Ballard said. "Even when I have the right to cross, some of the people give me the look to get out of the way."

Ballard said she thought pedestrians would have to decide for themselves whether to pay attention to the new signs.

"That's up to the individual," Ballard said. "They either do what it says or some people do the wrong thing. I'm so careful. The light doesn't always mean anything."

A team of about 10 people from Casa de Maryland walked the section of Piney Branch Road for the past two weeks talking to pedestrians crossing the road — correctly and incorrectly — about the new signs.

"This is the sort of the one-two punch with education and of the county trying to be safe on the street," Dunckel said.

Casa volunteers walked around four days per week, talking to people and handing out fliers and tote bags with information, said Michael Petrick, work force development specialist with Casa. The group's last day patrolling was Saturday.

"We can definitely progress to a better Long Branch by informing people of this," Petrick said. "Because of that, we were able to really communicate first and foremost with the people that live in the area."

lower

The response from pedestrians was mostly positive, Petrick said.

"A lot of people are either very receptive or surprised that someone would be paying attention to the Piney Branch Corridor," Petrick said.

The county started focusing on the eight locations with high pedestrian accidents a few years ago, Dunckel said. The county did a detailed safety audit, studying the areas over the course of several days and then planning strategies to make them safer, Dunckel said.

At Piney Branch Road, the county upgraded and installed new street lights, widened sidewalks, repainted crosswalks and corrected malfunctioning traffic signals, Dunckel said.

Since the county started implementing safety initiatives at these places, the number of pedestrian collisions decreased 56 percent collectively at the eight locations, Dunckel said.

After safety measures were implemented on Piney Branch Road in 2009, the number of pedestrian collisions went from 8.8 per year to 5.5 per year, Dunckel said.

The results of the new curb sign program remain to be seen, Dunckel said.

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